

**State of Connecticut**  
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**



**COMMISSION ON CHILDREN**

***Testimony of Elaine Zimmerman***  
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**Connecticut Commission on Children**

**Education Committee**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee,

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children. I submit testimony in support of Raised Bill 6432 and offer a few suggestions for the legislation. For the record, I served as a consultant to the federal government for Reading First and Early Reading First.

The achievement gap in Connecticut is a scandalous reality. Too many children are failing. Regardless of family stressors, economic challenges or language barriers, a good education is meant to be the grand equalizer in our democracy. Families put endless hope in this opportunity and find their children unnecessarily placed in special education or failing to read by third grade. Race bias is often a winner in this outcome; school success is not.

The focus in RB 6432 on full accessibility to school readiness slots in priority school districts is outstanding. Quality preschool offers a necessary jumpstart for thousands of children from low-income communities. Full day kindergarten helps children thrive and parents work. It would be helpful if the bill referenced the core components of quality full day kindergarten as itemized in PA 98-243 Section 4(b). This includes *transition to school plans, curriculum, parental involvement, assessment and reading readiness*.

The third item that gives a boost for young children is literacy. I would suggest in Section 3, that *'with proven reading assessment instruments and research-based teacher training'* be added after the word curricula. Curricula, without timely assessment and intervention, will definitively not lead to success. Similarly, the details of what should be in curricula for reading should include research based instruction as delineated in the Early Reading Success law, PA 98-243. This includes a systematic and rigorous approach to reading instruction and must address vocabulary, spelling, phonics, fluency and comprehension.

Our teachers have not been taught the science of reading. Thirty percent of those coming out of our higher education programs failed the Foundation of Reading test. They did not know how to assess, intervene or mend reading difficulties. This is not the fault of the children or the teachers. We are giving neither cohort the tools they need for success.

Our current reading assessment tool, the DRA, does not go far enough. It is not teacher-friendly, takes weeks to administer and offers little information in how to group children with various challenges. Our teachers have added other assessments around this tool, to make up for its limited scope. Other reading assessment tools used in states that have made a dent in the achievement gap, are more current, offer more information to the teacher and, in many cases, are technologically current, providing speed and improved accuracy. This sort of teacher-friendly approach would go a long way in our state.

Without a detailed delineation of what should be in the reading curriculum, quality teacher training in how to assess and intervene in reading and a modern assessment tool; we risk continued failure and predictable low outcomes for our more vulnerable children.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and your review.